

OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES PERSONNEL NEWSLETTER

June 1998

Merit Systems Principles and Prohibited Personnel Practices

As outlined in the Center's strategic plan and various policy communications, the Lewis Research Center has adopted an organizational goal to cultivate a "model workplace." This goal is based, in part, on a Governmentwide objective to operate as a "model employer." The framework of the current Federal personnel system was drafted with this objective in mind. Specifically, it is based on two sets of basic principles, the merit system principles and prohibited personnel practices. Outlined below is information concerning these principles and how the Center's strategic plan, policies, and objectives support them.

Merit Systems Principles

The Merit Systems Principles (5 USC 2301(b)) outline the requirements for managing the workforce in a fair and equitable manner and protect employees from arbitrary and capricious personnel actions and decisions.

The following nine "merit principles" have been established in law and form the foundation of the Federal personnel management system:

1. ***Recruitment should be from sources that will achieve a workforce including all segments of society and selection and advancement should be based solely on relative ability, knowledge, and skill after fair and open competition which assures that all receive equal opportunity.*** This principle is the foundation of Governmentwide staffing (i.e., recruitment, hiring, promoting) requirements. It is the reason applicants are asked to address the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOC's) they may possess in relation to the job for which they are applying. It is also why announcements are published and advertised in a variety of ways and that selections are to be made based on job relatedness. This principle also may be viewed as a basis for the Center's goal for a diverse workforce and, along with principle number 2, supports the Center's key value of "diversity."
2. ***All employees and applicants should receive fair and equitable treatment in all aspects of personnel management without regard to political affiliation, race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, age or handicapping condition, and with proper regard for their privacy and constitutional rights.*** This principle reiterates what is established in law, rule, and regulation regarding equal employment opportunity Governmentwide and on an Agency and Centerwide basis. It requires that all personnel decisions be based on job-related and mission-related criteria.
3. ***Equal Pay should be provided for work of equal value, with appropriate consideration of both national and local rates paid by employers in the private sector, and appropriate incentives and recognition should be provided for excellence in performance.*** This principle is the foundation of the Federal classification system and awards system. It requires that an employee's pay range (i.e., grade level) be based on an accurate and equitable evaluation of the level of work for the employee's position. In order to ensure that this is occurring, position descriptions are used to outline the duties assigned to a position. Governmentwide classification standards are then applied to those duties to determine the proper grade level of the work, thus ensuring consistency across the Government. That is why it is important that the position description accurately describes the work being performed. When a supervisor signs the position description, he/she is certifying that the work assigned is at the level described. When the position is classified, the certified duties are used to determine the appropriate classification of the position.
4. ***All employees should maintain high standards of integrity, conduct, and concern for the public interest.*** The Federal disciplinary system is premised on this principle; i.e., that it promotes the efficiency of the service to maintain standards of conduct and behavior. In order to ensure that all employees maintain high standards of integrity and conduct, the Government has established Government standards of conduct. Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch are outlined in 5 CFR Part 2635 and are applicable to all employees of NASA. It further supports the Center's key value of "integrity."

5. ***The Federal workforce should be used efficiently and effectively.*** This principle indicates that organizations be designed and managed cost effectively; employees be assigned work in a cost efficient/effective manner and that resources be used with efficiency in mind. Decisions should be based on (1) if it is legal, (2) if it helps the mission, (3) if it does what it is suppose to do, and (4) if it is worth the cost. Governmentwide programs for quality, continuous improvement, and customer focus are rooted in this basic principle. It is also the reason that a sound position management program is important. The Center's key value of "quality" is in line with this principle.
6. ***Employees should be retained on the basis of the adequacy of their performance, inadequate performance should be corrected, and employees should be separated who cannot or will not improve their performance to meet required standards.*** This principle provides the authority for taking performance-based actions. That is, that employees not meeting performance standards should be notified of performance deficiencies, management must work with employees to improve performance and those not meeting standards after an opportunity to improve should be separated. These actions are accomplished at Lewis in accordance with the Employee Performance Communication System (EPCS) and established negotiated agreements.
7. ***Employees should be provided effective education and training in cases in which such education and training would result in better organizational and individual performance.*** This principle is the basis on which the Government training and development policies are based. Such policies require there be a tangible relationship between results and costs of training/education paid for with Government training funds. Center policy further requires that training dollars only be spent on training and development that will benefit the Center; i.e., where the training authorized will be used on the current job or to meet future mission needs.
8. ***Employees should be protected against arbitrary action, personal favoritism, or coercion for partisan political purposes and prohibited from using their official authority or influence for the purpose of interfering with or affecting the result of an election or a nomination for election.*** This principle protects employees from coercion and citizens from a politicized Federal workforce. It is further codified in the Hatch Act.
9. ***Employee should be protected against reprisal for the lawful disclosure of information which the employees reasonably believe evidences a violation of any law, rule, or regulation or mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety.*** The principle protects the "whistleblower" from reprisal. The Whistle Blowers Protections Act further protects such disclosures.

Prohibited Personnel Practices

Prohibited personnel practices (5 USC 2302) specify the personnel practices that must be avoided by anyone who is in a position to take or influence personnel actions and ensures that the merit system principles and the integrity of the merit system are not undermined. They specify the types of things a Federal employee who has personnel authority may not do.

It is a prohibited personnel practice to:

1. ***Discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, handicapping condition, marital status, or political affiliation.***
2. ***Solicit or consider employment recommendations based on factors other than personal knowledge or records of job related abilities or characteristics.***
3. ***Coerce an employee's political activity or take any action against any employee or applicant as a reprisal for the refusal to participate in such activity.***
4. ***Deceive or willfully obstruct a person's right to compete for employment.***
5. ***Influence any person to withdraw from competition for a position to improve or injure the employment prospects of any particular employee or applicant.***
6. ***Give any unauthorized preference or advantage to any person to improve or injure the employment prospects of any particular employee or applicant.***
7. ***Appoint, employ, promote, advance, or advocate for appointment, employment, promotion, or advancement of any individual who is a relative (a spouse, parents and step-parents, children and step-children, full and half siblings, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews, first cousins, and in-laws).***
8. ***Retaliate (i.e., take or fail to take, or threaten to take or fail to take a personnel action) against a whistleblower, whether an employee or an applicant.***
9. ***Retaliate against an employee or applicant who exercises their appeal, complaint, or grievance rights, testifies for or lawfully assists any individual exercising such right, cooperates with an Inspector General or the Special Counsel, or refuses to obey an order that would require the individual to violate a law.***
10. ***Discriminate based on personal conduct which is not adverse to on-the-job performance of the employee, applicant, or others.***
11. ***Violate any law, rule, or regulation which implements or directly concerns the merit principles.***

The following examples would be considered prohibited personnel practices:

- Sexual harassment.
- Selecting an individual for promotion because of a personal friendship, not job-related factors.
- Considering a personal recommendation for an applicant for a summer intern position from the applicant's relative.
- Inappropriately using a temporary appointing authority in order to hire a person with political connections.
- Violating the requirements of the Federal classification system (i.e., misstating duties in a position description to ensure that the position will be classified at a higher grade level).

It is not a prohibited personnel practice to:

- Consider, as a selecting official, the capabilities and performance of applicants for a position you are filling based on your personal knowledge of their skills and abilities for the job being filled.
- Decide to reassign an employee to a position rather than announce a vacancy to provide promotion opportunities.
- Transfer (lateral) an employee from another Agency rather than fill the position internally.
- Decide to limit the scope of the area of consideration.
- Select for promotion an applicant that does not have the highest ranking panel score.

The head of each Government Agency and those delegated personnel management authority (i.e., managers, supervisors, personnel officials) are responsible for the prevention of prohibited personnel practices. The Office of Special Counsel (OSC) is responsible for investigating allegations of prohibited personnel practices and prosecutes such cases before the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB). Following an investigation, the OSC may recommend that an Agency take corrective action if there is a reason to believe that a prohibited personnel practice has occurred. If the Agency fails to take such action, the OSC may recommend that the MSPB order corrective action. Federal employees who are found to have participated in these practices are subject to disciplinary action up to and including removal from Federal service and may include debarment from Federal employment for a period not exceeding 5 years or a monetary fine up to \$1,000.



OHR TRIVIA

Question:

What are the numbers shown in block 42 of your SF-50 Notification of Personnel Action?

Answer on Page 8

NASA EXTERNAL AWARDS

Every quarter, the Center receives requests for nominations for a wide variety of non-NASA awards. A call letter with nomination criteria summaries is sent to the directorate offices for distribution. Please call the Awards Office at 433-2848, for specific information.

The following is a list of non-NASA External Awards solicitation due this quarter, July to September 1998:

Executive Excellence Award
GEICO Public Service Awards
National Partnership Award
National Medal of Technology
American Astronautical Society Awards



Black Engineer of the Year Award
Elder Statesmen of Aviation Award
President's Quality Award Program
Women in Aerospace (WIA) Awards
Rotary National Award for Space Achievement

American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics
Aviation Week and Space Technology - Distinguished Service Award

Preselection

The term “preselection” is not specifically defined in any law or regulation. The merit systems principles and the prohibited personnel practices, however, set the parameters of what and what is not acceptable in regards to personnel management. Because the term is used to describe various actions, some of which are not in violation of merit principles, it is important to understand the concept and when it is a prohibited personnel practice.

The primary merit systems principle that needs to be considered in preselection allegations is that advancement in the Federal sector be based on relative ability, knowledge, and skill after fair and open competition. The key is that a selection must be based on merit factors and allow for fair and open competition.

Preselection is usually used to imply that an individual is given preferential treatment, based on nonmerit factors and selected regardless of the qualifications of other candidates. Used in that regard, it is a violation of the prohibited personnel practice that disallows “granting any preference or advantage not authorized by law, rule, or regulation to any employee or applicant for employment for the purpose of improving or injuring the prospects of any particular person for employment.” Note that the prohibition is against granting an unauthorized preference. A preference, such as Veterans preference, which is authorized by law and regulation, is not at issue. Examples of granting an unauthorized preference or advantage may include: (1) defining the scope or manner of competition or the requirements for a position in order to select a predetermined candidate; (2) classifying a position by assigning a specific title and/or series to enable an identified candidate to qualify for the job; or (3) promoting an employee in order to protect him/her from being downgraded in an impending reduction-in-force.

Other violations of prohibited personnel practices may also occur to grant an unauthorized preference to an employee or applicant. For instance, to encourage a priority candidate to withdraw from competition to enable the Agency to hire another candidate is a prohibited practice. To falsely record that a candidate had declined consideration to be able to hire a candidate with lower ranking is also prohibited.

It is equally important to understand what does not constitute “preselection.” A common misconception is that it is inappropriate for a selecting official to identify potential candidates for a position, including those already working for him/her, based on his/her knowledge of the employee’s skills and abilities. Another unfounded belief is that the selecting official is prohibited from forming an opinion or preference based on his/her knowledge of the potential candidates capabilities and performance. Both of these assumptions are false. Making a selection based on job-related, merit based preferences is not a violation of the merit principles or any prohibited personnel practice. Again, the important factor is that the selection be based on merit factors after considering all applicants.

There are few things to keep in mind:

- Neither the merit systems principles nor the prohibited personnel practices give employees the right to be considered for all vacancies. Management has the right to fill vacant positions through a variety of methods including external recruitment and hiring, transferring from other Agencies, competitive merit promotion process, and reassignment. Transfers and reassignments may be made without going through the competitive process. Therefore, it is not a prohibited personnel practice nor does it support an allegation of preselection if a selecting official uses appropriate noncompetitive methods to fill a vacant position.
- The employee or applicant with the highest score does not have to be selected for the vacancy. The rating and ranking process is used merely to differentiate among those who meet the minimum qualifications and those that are the best qualified. All the best qualified candidates (those with the highest scores) are referred to the selecting official for consideration. The selecting supervisor is not provided information that indicates who received the highest score.
- Any manipulation of the personnel system in order to help or hinder the prospects of others for employment is a prohibited personnel practice.
- No prohibited personnel practice has been committed, as long as a selecting official allows for open competition, fairly considers all candidates, and bases the selection decision on job-related criteria.





Medical Services:

Sharon Bohnak attended the Occupational Health Conference in Boston from April 24, through May 1. An award was given to Hummer Associates from the American Board of Occupational Health Nurses for their support in research and excellence in Occupational Health Nursing.



Insurance Reimbursement

Lewis Research Center provides health screening physical exams, medical care, and preventive health programs to Center employees through our contractor operated Office of Medical Services. This Office is operated under a contract which is currently held by Hummer Associates. The services provided by this Office are effective in the improvement of employee health and the control of health care costs. The cost of the contract is approximately \$1 million per year. In addition, in FY97, Lewis paid more than \$5.5 million as the Government share of employee health insurance premiums. Many of the services provided to employees by the Office of Medical Services are covered under the insurance contracts. This includes such services as mammography, prostate screening, pap smears, and colon cancer screening.

Faced with proposed budget cuts over the last 2 years, we have taken an innovative approach to dealing with the proposed funding shortfall. In an effort to maintain the level of services provided to all Lewis employees while reducing costs, we have implemented a program through which Medical Services will attempt to recover from employees insurance carriers the cost of certain medical procedures. This is a pilot program and a collaboration between the

Office of Human Resources, the Office of Acquisition, AFGE, IFPTE, Hummer Associates, and NASA Headquarters.

Medical Services will bill your insurance carrier for certain reimbursable services, after they are provided. You can expect to receive an explanation of benefits from your carrier. This is an attempt to recover reimbursable charges, and it will not impact the level or type of services currently provided. Services will still be provided to all employees regardless of their insurance coverage or type of carrier (HMO or fee for service). If your insurance requires an annual deductible, the cost of services provided by the Office of Medical Services will be applied toward meeting the deductible. Treatment of work-related injuries or illnesses and OSHA required medical monitoring will not be billed to your insurance carrier.

The first phase of this program was implemented during the 1995 Breast Screening (Mammography) Program. This innovative approach resulted in a savings to Lewis of \$6,000. In FY97, the Mammography and Sigmodoscopy tests resulted in a savings of \$15,297. In FY98, all reimbursable services will be billed to the carriers resulting in a saving of \$9,865, as of March 31, 1998.

Early Retirement Legislation (Information)

The President signed legislation which would return the voluntary early retirement authority (VERA) program to its status before the Torres court decision last fall. Specifically, the following changes are effective upon date of enactment, Friday, **May 1, 1998, through September 30, 1999:**

1. To be eligible for early retirement, an individual must have been employed continuously by the Agency for at least the 31-day period ending on the date of VERA request. Since NASA submitted its request on February 27, employees must have been continuously employed by NASA since January 27, 1998.
2. Eligible employees must be serving under an appointment that is not time-limited.
3. An employee who has been "duly notified" (i.e., received a decision letter) that he or she is to be involuntarily separated for misconduct or unacceptable performance is not eligible.
4. An agency may target early retirements based on organization, occupational series, grade, geographical location, or other similar nonpersonal factors, as determined by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).
5. OPM has authority to regulate the scope of agency authorities.

The legislative language is contained in H.R. 3579.



ATTENTION, ATTENTION, ATTENTION!



Office of Human Resources Web Site

The Office of Human Resources (OHR) continually updates its web site to provide you with useful information. In it you will find vacancy announcements, HR program information, benefit information, HR policies, forms, who to call for specific HR services, and even past issues of the Personnel Newsletter. There are also links to other web sites that provide employment information such as CTAP home page, employment listing on "Yahoo", and Virtual Career Fair, reference material including Code of Federal Regulations and Federal Employees News Digest, and a search engine that will search all of Lewis. Visit the OHR web site at <http://www.lerc.nasa.gov/WWW/OHR>. Please, use the feedback button to let us know what you think.

Organization Development and Training Office Web Site

The Organization Development and Training Office (OD&TO) is pleased to announce the creation of their web site. Although the web site is still under construction, there is still valuable information available such as a weekly training schedule, quarterly calendars for Leadership Management Development and Program Project Management, and OD&TO services available. In the future we will be posting course announcements to the web site. Please take a moment and browse through the web site at <http://www.lerc.nasa.gov/WWW/ODT>. Comments can be sent to Dennis.C.Conrad@lerc.nasa.gov and Kathy.M.Clark@lerc.nasa.gov.

FEDERAL EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT SYSTEM OPEN SEASON

We are planning for the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) Open Season to occur from July 1, through December 31, 1998, unless Congress acts to repeal it. As you may recall, the FERS Open Season was signed into law as part of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act of 1998. The President then used the line item veto to cancel section 642, which authorized the FERS Open Season. The National Treasury Employees' Union challenged the President's use of the line item veto. On January 6, 1998, the President withdrew the veto in settlement of the litigation. The President has now included, in his budget for Fiscal Year 1999, a supplemental appropriations request for 1998 that repeals the FERS Open Season Enrollment Act. Both Houses of Congress would have to enact the repeal and then pass it on to the President for his signature in order for this to occur. This is not likely to happen.

On March 11, Rep. Mica and several other members of the House of Representatives signed a letter stating that the general sentiment of the Congress is that they would not support a repeal of the FERS Open Enrollment Act. It is highly unlikely that the Senate would support the repeal considering that Senator Stevens was the sponsor of the Act. In short, Agencies should be ready to administer the FERS Open Enrollment Act beginning on July 1, 1998. While it is true that the Open Season will run until December 31, 1998, transfers will be effective the first full pay period after the transfer form is processed.

Employees have many questions and concerns about the transfer to FERS. Many simply did not consider it during the original Open Season, in 1987, because it was new and they did not trust the system. Also, many workers were not comfortable with the answers, or lack of answers, they received. Some have not thought about FERS since the original Open Season because they believed that there would not be another Open Season.

The majority of what CSRS employees know about FERS is the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) element only. For example, the fact that someone in FERS may contribute 10 percent of base pay

and get the Agency automatic and matching, so that if they contribute 5 percent the Agency puts in an additional 5 percent. Employees who transfer will be entitled to the Agency automatic 1 percent and matching contributions to the (TSP) upon transfer. They also have a 30-day window during which time they can complete a TSP-1 form, even if it is not a TSP Open Season, to increase or direct their investment contributions.

There is more to FERS than just the TSP. Employees should be encouraged to find out how much Social Security coverage they currently have. Someone with very little Social Security coverage, who is not planning to work long enough to earn their 40 credits, will find that the Social Security taxes they pay after transferring to FERS will not result in any Social Security benefit. An analysis of personal risk tolerance for the TSP investments is also needed. We can all make money in a Bull market, but not all employees are comfortable when their principle does not increase, or worse yet, actually decreases. We have illustrated in a number of Employee Benefits Review articles that stocks have historically outperformed the other two investment options, but investments in stocks can lose money on a short term basis. Investing in the "C" fund is a long-term concept.

Further, employees should be encouraged to understand the provisions of CSRS, FERS, and Social Security that are most important to them keeping in mind that the original Open Season was more than 10 years ago (July 1, 1987, to December 31, 1987, with the belated Open Season running until June 30, 1998,) and that individual circumstances may have changed. If in no other way, they are 10 years closer to retiring.

The U. S. Office of Personnel Management has scheduled a 90 minute Satellite Broadcast, June 24, 1998, from 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m., Link Channel 13. This broadcast is directed to all CSRS and CSRS Offset Employees who are eligible to transfer.

To provide additional information to CSRS and CSRS offset employees, a training seminar will be held August 3, 1998. Further details will be provided to you at a later date.



THE THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN

AND

INDIVIDUAL RETIREMENT ARRANGEMENTS



Participants frequently ask questions about the TSP accounts and Individual Retirement Arrangements (IRA's). You may find the following information helpful; however, for authoritative tax advice, you should consult a tax advisor, state taxing authority, or local Internal Revenue Service (IRS) office.

Can I contribute to both my TSP account and an IRA?

Yes. Your participation in the TSP does not affect your eligibility to contribute to an IRA. Your IRA provider or your tax advisor can give you specific information about the different types of IRAs, the rules affecting each type, and how they apply to your situation. You can also obtain a copy of IRS publication 590, IRA's."

Can I transfer my IRA to my TSP account?

No. Contributions to TSP accounts can be made only through payroll deductions. The law does not allow transfers of funds to the TSP from an IRA or other source.

Can I transfer money from my TSP account to my IRA?

Yes. If you have left Government service and elect to receive a single payment (or certain monthly payments), you can ask the TSP to transfer all or any portion of your payment directly to an IRA. You can also roll over all or any portion of amounts that are paid to you. (A transfer occurs when the TSP deposits your account directly into your IRA; a roll over occurs when you receive your payment from the TSP and then deposit it into your IRA yourself.) Similarly, you can either transfer or roll over an in-service withdrawal.

However, whether you are currently employed or are separated from service, you cannot transfer or roll over any payment from your TSP account to a "Roth" IRA (a new type of IRA) without tax consequences.

What are the tax consequences if I transfer or roll over money from the TSP to an IRA?

If you have the TSP transfer the money directly to your IRA, you do not pay taxes (or an early withdrawal tax penalty when you are separated before age 55 yet under age 59 1/2) until you withdraw the money from the IRA. However, if you receive the money directly, the TSP must withhold 20 percent for Federal income taxes even if you then decide to roll it over to your IRA (which you can do within 60 days of receiving it). This mandatory withholding does not apply if you choose monthly payments expected to last 10 years or more calculated on the basis of IRS life expectancy tables. If you decide to roll over your withdrawal after you receive it, you can deposit personal funds into your IRA equal to the amount withheld for taxes. Otherwise, the amount withheld will itself be subject to taxes (and early withdrawal tax penalty, if applicable). For more information about the mandatory tax withholding, see the tax notice "Important Tax Information About Payments From Your TSP Account," which is available from your Personnel Office or the TSP Web site: www.tsp.gov.

Can I transfer my TSP account to the IRA of my spouse?

No. Your spouse's IRA is not eligible to receive your TSP account. However, a spouse can transfer amounts received from the TSP to his or her IRA upon the death of a participant or pursuant to a qualifying order.

WHAT KIND OF RIGHTS?

Weingarten rights are mandated by law and came to be through an actual case decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1975. In that case, management had suspected an employee, named Weingarten, of theft and called the employee in to ask questions. The employee insisted on having a union representative present to help her respond to the questions. The manager refused to allow such assistance. When the employee refused to answer the questions without a representative present, the company fired the employee.

An unfair labor practice complaint was filed and eventually was heard by the Supreme Court. In the decision, the Court determined that if the meeting included both management and a bargaining unit employee, was investigative in nature, and the unit member feared discipline as a result of the discussion, upon request, Ms. Weingarten was entitled to union representation at the meeting. Agencies are required to post annual notices of these rights. The following "Annual Notice of Right to Request Union Representation" satisfies this requirement.

ANNUAL NOTICE OF RIGHT TO REQUEST UNION REPRESENTATION (WEINGARTEN RIGHTS)

The Civil Service Reform Act gives employees in units represented by an exclusive labor organization the right to request union representation at an examination by a representative of the agency in connection with an investigation if the employee believes the examination may result in disciplinary action.

Section 7114(a) of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (CSRA) states that:

- (2) An exclusive representative of an appropriate unit in an agency shall be given the opportunity to be represented at
 - (B) any examination of an employee in the unit by a representative of the agency in connection with an investigation if
 - (i) the employee reasonably believes that the examination may result in disciplinary action against the employee; and
 - (ii) the employee requests representation.

Section 7114(a)(3) of the CSRA requires that employees receive annual notice of the rights set forth above. If you have any questions relative to this notice, please contact Lori O. Pietravoia, Personnel Management Specialist, at PABX 3-2506.

Restored Leave from the 1995 Furlough

The deadline for using restored leave from the 1995 furlough is December 31, 1998. If that restored leave is not used by the end of the 1998 leave year, you will lose it and it will be returned to the Federal Government on January 3, 1999. If you do not want to lose that restored leave, you can use it this year, donate it to someone in the leave transfer program, or take it with you if you leave the Federal Government by January 2, 1999.

OHR TRIVIA

Answer:

The date of your next within grade (WIG) increase.

Rights of Employees Under the Labor-Relations Statute

The Federal Labor-Relations Statute (5 USC Chapter 71) guarantees employees specific rights regarding labor-management relations in the Federal Government. These rights can be summarized as follows:

1. Employees have the right to organize themselves into bargaining units and select a particular union to represent them. They may do so freely and without the fear of interference, restraint, coercion, threats, or reprisal.
2. Employees are free to join or not join a certified union. It is inappropriate for management to either encourage or discourage Federal employees to join or pay dues to a union.
3. Employees are free to assist the union or refrain from assisting it. If an employee chooses to assist the union, he/she may participate in the management of the union and in acting as a union representative. This may include presenting the union's views to officials of the agency, as well as officials of the Executive Branch, Congress or other appropriate authorities.
4. Employees have the right to engage in collective bargaining in regards to conditions of employment through representatives chosen by employees. The union representatives are responsible for ensuring that the interests of all employees in the unit are represented in this regard.
5. Employees are entitled to representation and assistance from the union in dealing with agency management, regardless of their union membership status. This in no way precludes an employee from exercising their grievance or appeal rights and/or being represented by an attorney or other representative of their choosing, other than the union, in any grievance or appeal action, unless the negotiated agreement stipulates otherwise.

The labor-relations statute protects employees in the exercise of these rights. The Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) is the agency responsible for enforcing the statute. As such, they are responsible for investigating any allegations of a violation and issuing a complaint, if it is warranted.

Questions regarding employee labor-relations rights may be directed to the Office of Human Resources at PABX 3-2504 or 3-2506 or to the unions afforded exclusive recognition at the Center, IFPTE, Local 28 or AFGE, Local 2182.

“Building Trust in Virtual Teams”

New research out of the University of Texas suggests that trust, an essential ingredient for effective teamwork, develops in virtual teams in a different way than face-to-face teams. A study of 29 virtual teams operating globally and communicating strictly through E-Mail found that the teams with the highest levels of trust tended to share three traits.

First, they introduced themselves and provided some personal background before focusing on the work at hand, establishing a level of knowledge-based trust. In fact, initial electronic messages tended to set the tone for the entire project. Second, they set clear roles for each member which enabled all of them to identify with one another, building identification-based trust. Third, team members consistently demonstrated an enthusiastic, action-oriented attitude in all their messages. “One pessimist has the potential to undermine an entire virtual team,” the researcher said.

As we work across the Agency and across the globe in more virtual situations, developing our virtual competence will become increasingly important.

Summarized from HBR, May-June 1998 issue. Contact Cindy Forman, PABX 3-2992, for more information.

CAREER TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM CENTER

21000 Brookpark Road
Cleveland, OH 44135
Phone (216) 433-8502
Fax (216) 433-8871



Tuesday, June 23

9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

CTAPC 1-Day Career Management Workshop

Wednesday, June 24

9 a.m. - 12 Noon

Start Your Own Business

Thursday, July 9

9 a.m. - 12 Noon

ABLE Adult Life Balance Inventory

Thursday, July 16

9 a.m. - 12 Noon

Communicating Your Leadership Qualities in an Interview

Wednesday, July 22

9 a.m. - 12 Noon

Interviewing Skills to WOW em'

Tuesday, July 28

9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

CTAPC 1-Day Career Management

Tuesday, August 4

9 a.m. - 12 Noon

Influencing Skills

**Please E-Mail Ms. Cindy Cox at (Cynthia.A.Cox@lerc.nasa.gov)
if interested in attending any of the above events.**